

CRIME & SCANDAL

HISTORY's 'American Ripper': Could H.H. Holmes Be Jack the Ripper?

In "American Ripper," a new eight-part series premiering on HISTORY on July 11th, the great-great-grandson of H.H. Holmes claims "America's First Serial Killer" was London's notorious "Jack the Ripper."

MEREDITH WORTHEN • JUL 7, 2017

In the late 1800s, a horrific serial killer terrorized Chicago through his elaborate maze of death traps built into a massive three-story hotel that took up the entire block of 63rd and Wallace streets. **H.H. Holmes** (born Herman Webster Mudgett) is an infamous fixture in American history. He **confessed to killing 27 people** in his "Murder Castle" as it became known, although many believe his victims amount to more than 200. He was always fascinated by death—he mutilated animals, stole corpses, and eventually seduced and murdered numerous women to satisfy his sadistic urges and to claim insurance monies. He is known as "America's First Serial Killer" but some believe that America was not his only hunting ground.

London, perhaps, was also the site of Holmes' killings. In the late 1800s, a murderer lurked the slums in and around the Whitechapel district of London in 1888 killing women and mutilating their bodies. The murderer received the moniker "**Jack the Ripper**" and the legend of his killings has been fully solidified in history and in media. Beyond the brutal nature of his murders, part of the fascination with Jack the Ripper is his unknown identity. "Ripperologists" have generated **hundreds of theories** to try to identify this murderer. However, one theory is currently louder than all the others.

Jeff Mudgett, a lawyer and former Commander in the U.S. Naval Reserve, claims that his great-great-grandfather, H.H. Holmes was, in fact, Jack the Ripper. Mudgett bases his assertions on the writings in two diaries he inherited from Holmes which detail Holmes's participation in the murder and mutilation of numerous prostitutes in London. Mudgett also claims that the **man that died in the public hanging** that took place on May 7, 1896 was not Holmes, but rather a man that Holmes tricked into going to the gallows in his place. These shocking twists to the well-known murderous stories of Holmes and Jack the Ripper are detailed in Mudgett's book, *Bloodstains* and can be seen in the HISTORY's new eight-part series, *American Ripper*, which premieres on July 11th.

Mudgett is not the first to claim to know the identity of Jack the Ripper and he will not be the last. Although Mudgett's theory is controversial, it is hard to deny the eerily similar overlap between Holmes's and Jack the Ripper's psychopathic, brutal, and grotesque murderous histories. The details of their sadistic killings culminate into nothing short of Hollywood horror. In fact, their stories have been solidified in films for nearly 100 years. Jack the Ripper's horrific crusade can be seen in films from *Waxwork* (1924) to *Ripper* (2016). Holmes' violent murders are detailed in *H.H. Holmes: America's First Serial Killer* (2004) and *Havenhurst* (2017) as well as in the upcoming film, *Devil in the White City*, based on the book by Erik Larson, starring Leonardo DiCaprio as Holmes and directed by Martin Scorsese.

"American Ripper" premieres on July 11th at 10/9C on HISTORY.

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